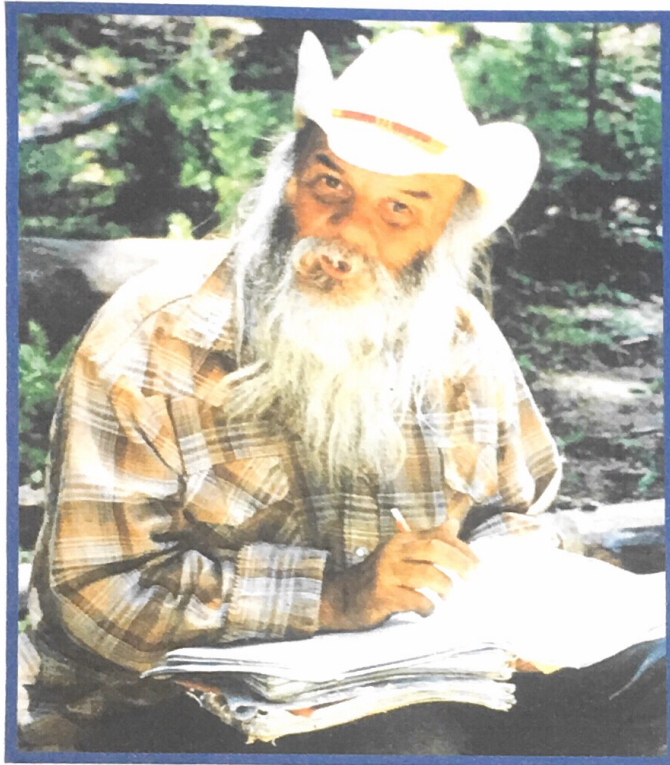




Rainbow Family

Life Stories



*by Jodey Bateman.
Interviews with Rainbow
Family of Living Light
folks conducted between
1977 and 2008.*

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Family"
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Matt and Moreen - Looking for Family

[I first met Matt on January 20, 1973, at a final rally against the Vietnam War. He was in the ninth grade at the time. I saw him at left-wing meetings at Oklahoma University during the next few weeks. Finally he ran away from home and stayed with me and some friends briefly. After he was returned to his home and then sent to military school, I started getting letters from him. Part of this life story comes from Matt's letters, but most of it is from an interview I did with him and Moreen in November, 1977. They had met at the New Mexico Gathering.]

MATT

I don't feel like I've been alive very long. I've been alive just the past four or five years. I used to have nothing but just school and home to think about. Now I see things I never seen before. Used to be when I'd see something, I wouldn't consider it.

I was born in Arkansas City, Kansas in 1958. My dad is Cherokee, born in Tahlequah, Oklahoma - Cherokee country. He was raised in Ark. City, just up the road. He was the only one of his brothers that completed high school. From what he tells me, he was pretty poor. They lived on the Arkansas River in Kansas. They didn't have no running water, just a well. They had wood for heat. His dad was killed by tuberculosis.

I was raised in Norman, Oklahoma. My father worked for the Weather Service National Storm Watch and all that. He was a radar technician. He flew as a hurricane hunter around Miami, Florida, after he got divorced. He left us four kids with our mother in Norman. Then he got transferred to Garden City, Kansas, and got custody of me and my older brother Mark and took us up there and gradually he got custody of all four of us kids.

I never thought of the fact that my father was Cherokee. I thought of myself as primarily white. That's how he thought of himself. There was never any sound of the old tongue. He couldn't speak it. He raised me to be a city boy. I still can't ride a horse. He never taught me how to hunt. The only kind of hunting he ever did was just road hunting. That's just driving down the road

and shooting anything he could see. That ain't no hunting. Just about everybody and their dogs claim to be Cherokee. I suppose all the white people feel sorry for moving the Indians off their lands so they try to feel better by claiming to be Cherokee because they're an eighteenth or a twentieth. My dad's brother showed me a photograph of people he said were my ancestors—two women who looked like native women in moccasins and a man who looked native dressed in a suit. But people claim to be Cherokee and yet they don't think about the Creator's plan. They just want to make money and live in concrete cities—not relate to the earth.

I used to get along with my mother, but she sure put an end to that nonsense. I don't really care about seeing her again. In Akwesasne Notes it says that to survive, we're gonna have to find out who our parents are and our brothers and sisters and grand parents, but unfortunately, not all of these are gonna be our blood relations. I want to find who my true mother and father will be.

I didn't think about Norman much. I just lived there with my mother—just another kid on the street. I left when I was 15, a freshman in high school. I tried to get a underground paper going in the ninth grade, but at the time I didn't have enough understanding. I had so much trust that I put the control of the so-called underground paper in the hands of the school. I was used to thinking of the school as help. The rule was, the principal had to see each issue before it came out to make sure we got our facts straight. There was only three issues of it before I got sent off to military school. It was more of a school curiosity than a force for change.

Just like I belonged to the Norman High Ecology Club because I was concerned about what we were doing to the earth. Like we took 55-gallon oil drums and placed them for trash cans. We was so slow. And we dug around this tree and placed manure so people wouldn't trample on it. We wasted a lot of time having elections for chairman and secretary and all that nonsense. And me and my friend Matt Burr tried to put out a science fiction magazine while the underground newspaper was coming out.

I've always enjoyed science fiction and writing.

I considered the Vietnamese war as a criminal war, so me and Matt Burr went to the anti-war march January 20, 1973, because I figured it would be a lot of fun. So the speakers said there was going to be a January 20th Committee to further the ideals of the anti-war parade, and I made it my habit to go. It was at this time I was beginning to break away from home and school. I had discovered that there was an outside world and I wanted to jump in the middle of it. I think the disagreement I had with my mother was just an excuse to break away. After I ran away, she took all the copies I had of the underground paper and two volumes of the journal I had been keeping to the police for their reading pleasure. She got two friends of mine in trouble out of my journal for smoking - cigarettes, not marijuana. I didn't smoke pot at the time.

I was going to school after I had run away. I had just split to let her cool off. School was still a big part of my life. I went back home to get some stuff. Then I was sitting at school waiting for a class and my mother drove up with Clarence, the big black dude she married. I ran off and Clarence followed me and beat me. The police put me in juvenile shelter. The next day I was in military school.

The military school was like going back in school for six months or a year. Their standards weren't up to where I had been. It was so simple it was ridiculous. They cut my hair to military length. I was a lowly cadet. You had to snap to attention when a sergeant passed by and salute lieutenants and all that nonsense. We had to march to meals. There were demerits for this and demerits for that and if you got too many, you didn't get to take the bus into Ponca City on Saturday to spend your measly allowance.

I started to run away. I just went AWO in Ponca City on Saturday. I didn't take the bus back, but my Jesus freak friends talked me into going back. They had a coffee house and a chapel. I was saved at their chapel at an early date. We'd have prayer meetings and stand in a circle and some people would get excited and talk in tongues, whooping and hollering.

I think Jesus Freaks are good at escaping. Because you're here on this earth now and you got to deal with it. You can't say "Oh Christ and the Lord will take care of it." 201

I stayed the night at the chapel. This guy there kept telling me he didn't fool around with his girlfriend very much because he respected her too much. When I woke up that morning, he was plastered against my back like a second skin. I didn't think nothing of it at the time. I didn't know then it could be homosexual. I thought it might be Christian love.

I was a day and a half AWOL and everybody thought that I had run away. My Jesus Freak friend gave me a ride back to military school. The punishment was something called flagpole. You had to march a total of 24 hours around a flagpole when you wasn't studying or in classes. I didn't get the punishment called faculty. That was each member of the faculty giving you two swats. I told the chaplain about my belief in Christ and all this nonsense, so I didn't get faculty.

It wasn't too long till the end of school. Then the court awarded custody of me and Mark to my father's care in Pierceville, Kansas, next to Garden City. My dad went through a lot of court stuff trying to say Clarence had damaged my nervous system. My parents fought for about five years in court after the divorce.

I worked hard clearing land on my dad's place by hand. I took up wearing a headband again along with the spirit band on my arm. I got into my bongo drums again. I got deadly with a bow and arrow.

That military school fucked me up for about two years after I got out. I was pretty crazy. I gradually fell away from being a Christian. I went through a lot of drugs and a lot of strange relationships with women. I couldn't handle school. Every time I went to school, I was loaded out of my mind on marijuana and what was called mescaline. I would go to school half undulating and sometimes I couldn't handle it and went home and sometimes it was fun.

My creative writing teacher was the only teacher I had that cared about his students. He knew the system was a crock of shit. I used to pay social calls at his house after school. I was a

straight A student for the first nine weeks of my sophomore year, but after that, I could see it was just a crock of shit and since then I've had nothing to do with it. I quit participating at 15 and dropped out legally at 16. I felt a lot better, especially when I wasn't going.

I moved into Garden City. I was working construction, mostly building houses, pouring concrete. When I was 17, my dad decided he'd tell me about sex. And I'd already been living with a girl for five months. I was doing all kinds of drugs then - speed, what was called acid, what was called masculine, cocaine, MDA. I tried everything except the opiates. I tried downers maybe three times, but I liked speed better. The wonder was I didn't get myself killed.

I did a little factory work here and there, but I never cared for factories much. I never worked more than three days in any factory. Ultimately I hoped to become self-employed or at least skilled to the point I would only have to work when I wanted to. I see no reason to allow myself to be degraded to a commodity just so I can be alive. Most people seem to regard the people who work for them as just that, peon commodities. I am a human being and expect to be treated as such.

All the work I ever did except for Cliff, I was just a peon - a common laborer. Cliff had a business installing underground lawn sprinklers. They weren't for crops. They were a luxury item. I worked there for two years except July '76 when I took off for Canada. I really had a great trip that summer. I can't believe how well everything went except for a few days in jail and even that served a purpose.

I was turned back at the Canadian border because I didn't have enough money. I took off west to Billings, Montana, then straight south to Denver to see a buddy of mine I hadn't seen since before Christmas. I got a ride with this freak in Casper, Wyoming who took me all the way to Denver, then helped me find my friend. We had quite a reunion. I stayed in Denver for a while, partying on some quality drugs, running around Denver and in the mountains. The mountains are really far out, but there are

too many people in them around Denver. From Denver I went back to Garden City for a few days to see my sister Kim. She was living with one of her girl friends, going to high school and working at the same time.

After that I went to Liberal, Kansas, and lived with two friends for maybe two weeks. I attended a concert there one night. I went as an excuse to get loaded (as if I needed one) and dance, maybe find a woman. After the concert we were all at a party and one of my friends got ripped off. He didn't realize it till the next morning when he went to get a bag out of his stash for someone, only to discover someone had made off with all the pot he had for sale. Talk about some upset people! Three of us business partners tracked the culprit down and pinned him in a little town 60 miles away. Apparently the punk was running for Denver but stopped in that town to get his shit he had stashed there. We recovered the pot, blew the fucker's car up in the country and gave him something to think about the next time he feels like burning somebody. If he ever does again. A tragedy with a happy ending, just like you see on TV. I thought the whole episode was pretty bizarre.

Eventually I got tired of Liberal and its day-to-day crises. My two friends and a new-found brother dropped me off on highway 83, north of Garden. I went up to Scott City and looked up this chick and stayed with her several days. I had a great time.

I caught a ride to Denver one night thinking I'd go to Arizona by way of Utah, over the mountains. As usual I partied down hard with my friends. Unfortunately it was too late in the season to attempt a mountain crossing with the gear I had. There was already snow above 7,000 feet and some roads in the mountains were closed. I split south on I-10. I met up with another hiker after dark. I bought him something to eat and we drank coffee and bullshit until almost midnight before crashing. I traveled with him to Tucson.

When I was in Tucson I had to do something - jobs was really tight. There were panhandlers on every corner, but I don't like panhandling. I learned how to make roach clips out of coat hangers. I sold them for a quarter each and coat hangers was easy to come by. I used to watch my friend Dave make belt pouches and purses. I had a

pouch that he made, so I decided to do it myself. I sold the first belt pouch I ever made for \$15 - \$3 more than I expected. I can make enough from leather to keep myself alive. I can make the things I need - shirts, shoes. So many people are into this buy trip. Leather work is my job, but not my career. My career is to keep myself alive. Leather is only how I make my money.

I got out of taking chemical drugs in Tucson, because I was a poor man. And I realized what a bunch of shit they was. And I quit cocaine because I realized the greed of the people who sold it fucked up the energy around the cocaine. I used to smoke manzanita in Tucson. Manzanita bushes grow wild in Arizona. It makes a good smoke.

I was in such rotten financial straits in Tucson that when Cliff wrote me there in the spring of '77, I went back to work for him in Garden City until the Rainbow Gathering. The people in Garden City really bummed me out. Except for a few select friends, I stayed to myself. I missed not having like minds to talk to. People just didn't care about their spirit, each other, their community. I could see so many things I know are wrong, but I got to feeling like I was banging my head against the wall.

I got a couple of interesting books from Akwesasne Notes. One is on the usage of various wild plants by the Cherokee people. The other is kind of a Cherokee-English dictionary. I got discouraged sometimes. There was nobody in Garden City to speak Cherokee with.

There's something that upset me about the attitudes of people I knew around Garden City, especially the older heads. They would look at me and see themselves. They told me I am doomed to failure because they failed in their dreams. Some attempted being self-sufficient and failed through stupid mistakes and being unprepared. Others thought I was a fool for trying to learn the old ways of what I consider my people. They think I might as well give up and be a white man because they used to wear an Indian suit and they are still white in mind and soul. A lot of people have Indian blood in them but blood is little. Being Cherokee is mind and soul. Am I a fool? Another white fool because I was raised a white man? I think not. A test of wills.

It was when I went to the Rainbow Gathering in 1977 that I

really went through some radical changes. That spring I wasn't getting high so much. Then I went back to Garden City and got back into it. It wasn't until I got there at the gathering in New Mexico that I could look back and see I was getting into the same trip where I had been before I started traveling.

I didn't honestly know what to expect at the gathering. It really shook me up. It was a really violent transition, because I went to Tucson to see some friends of mine before I went to the gathering. Coming from the concrete, artificial world of Tucson to the Rainbow Valley shook me to the roots of my feet. I remember when I got on the shuttle to go to near the valley, somebody told this girl, "Don't forget, it's legal to go naked here," and she said "Oh, OK" and she took off her top and put it in her pack and put the pack in the truck for us to carry down there for her. Then she went on running half-naked down the road toward the valley. And this guy took off his pants and put them in the floor of the truck and balanced on the side. At first everyone was shocked, but after I got down to the valley, pretty soon I was running around naked too.

I had a hard time figuring out why so many people was looking at me and saying, "Welcome home, brother." I thought, "Home? What home? I ain't never been here before. I don't know these people." Then I found a place to sleep for the night, and next morning I felt better.

I changed my life radically from the gathering—plus the fact I met Moreen there. I fully intended to go back to Garden City and my job and my old girlfriend. Then I heard a man say at council, "There is no time. Don't think you can wait and do something in the future. You've got to do it now if you want to save yourself and the world."

And I knew I couldn't go back to my job. I thought it was immoral before, but I had planned to go back to it. I had been getting up every morning and praying to the earth mother to forgive me for what I was doing to her. Like cutting up the earth to put plastic pipe in to water alien grasses was fucking the local ecology in the ear. If they had planted native grasses instead of alien ones, they wouldn't need an artificial watering system to make them grow.

I knew for what I wanted, I didn't want to make a lot of money. But I was scared shitless. That's why it took me so long to decide.

And finding Moreen was like finding the other half of me. I knew the Creator had some plan to bring us together to help someone. We found each other to be the perfect mate. It used to be the hardest damn thing in the world to find a woman I could communicate with.

At the gathering, there were always workshops to go to, that I was interested in, but I never got to go because I was always doing physical work - carrying crates, digging shitters, digging fire pits. I met Moreen the day I was digging a fire pit for the kiddie center. After that I hung around with her, except we would split up when we was working. I think the most important thing about the gathering was the fact I met Moreen.

The gathering really strengthened me. I was always used to being the unusual one, and there I was around a lot of people who thought like me. It was the beginning of a long journey. I don't think I'm a very advanced person spiritually, but I think that will come with time.

MOREEN

I was born in Canton, Ohio, in 1948. I'm nine years older than Matt. I have a brother older and a brother younger than me.

My father worked for the state liquor control. He made sure that the taverns had the right license and that there wasn't any illegal liquor being brought into Ohio. Then when I was in the eighth grade, he quit that job and bought his own lounge - like a tavern. Then my parents moved to Florida when I was 20 and I got a place by myself. I was going to Kent State and working both. I left Ohio in January, 1970, before the killings happened at Kent State in May. That was a small faction of people and there was 37,000 people going there. I didn't think for myself then. I didn't know anything about that kind of stuff then. Small town people went to Kent State, Ohio people. The girls went to Kent State to become teachers and meet someone to get married to. I didn't know anything about drugs then. I didn't know any free thinkers. My life was quiet as far as doing things and having things happen around me. I wasn't making them happen, that's for sure.

I just got to the point where I wasn't real content with my life. It wasn't real fulfilling. I just saw myself waiting for the guy I knew in high school to get back from Vietnam and I'd marry him.

and he'd get a job in a factory and that just didn't sound fulfilling. So my father called me and asked me to come down to Florida and stay with him and my mother. He said she cried for me every night. When I got down to the big city of Miami, Florida, I found out he wanted me to go to work at once. He just didn't want a daughter living alone by herself. He thought I should be with the family. He thought daughters either should get married or stay with their parents when they get out of high school and get a job.

Oh, this is a juicy thing. I stayed with three women in Miami Beach—one was an outright prostitute, one was almost, but wouldn't take money from men—just things like new jewelry or new clothes. The other woman was a doper. I was too naive to know it until she OD'd in front of us. I was real thin and one of the girls would get invited to a dinner party and I'd go with her because I was hungry, and it would turn out to be a sex orgy. They'd show dirty movies and take off their clothes and start grabbing at the girls and I'd leave. I was going to school at night and working full time at day then.

Then I moved to North Miami Beach with a woman named Camille and lived a quiet life until the 1972 Republican Convention. That was really an eye-opener to me. A whole bunch of people came to Miami. Camille and I went to a concert and met up with a whole bunch of men like I had never seen before, with long hair and beards and they told us they had come to Miami for the convention and they said the city had given them permission to stay in Flamingo Park. They asked me to go with them. They had the hippies and the yippies and the gay movement and women's liberation and all the different factions had tents in the park. You'd go in their tents and they'd give talks about what they were doing. That was my introduction to hippies.

I hung out there, then there was a riot. Violence just swept through the crowd. Long hairs started hitting long hairs and police started hitting police. Everybody was fighting everybody and it just got too crazy. We all had to leave the park and some of them didn't have a place to go and came over to our place to stay. And that was what opened my eyes that the police aren't right just because they're police and the government isn't right

just because it's a government.

The next good thing that happened was I got a scholarship to the University of Miami. I was a resident adviser in a dormitory for a year and that's where I learned to take care of myself. Before that I was working, but after I got to school, I was hungry. I learned how to take care of myself, how to find fruit on trees and get food stamps. I learned I don't need new clothes all the time. I dug in a couple of Good Will Thrift bins. The University of Miami is like a rich person's school. They threw away more than I had. It's America. I learned I didn't need to work eight hours a day at a job I disliked to survive. And that's what I learned at school.

The next eye-opener, I went with a man I met to Rockford, Illinois, and lived with him for a while. Matt doesn't like for me to talk about things like that, my old boyfriends, but that's part of my life. I learned about the horrors of factory life. My eyes had been closed to it in Canton, Ohio. My boyfriend worked in a real hard factory - Chrysler Motors. I worked in a television factory and saw how the women were exploited. They made \$2.16 an hour and they worked hard. The men made \$3.20 an hour and they didn't do anything. I got there and I wasn't eating well. I had never done any physical labor. I played volleyball, but that's not what makes you strong. And there I was working at hard labor alongside those hefty women, and I had to learn. I'm glad I had the experience.

Then I said, "I'm tired of this factory life," so I went to Miami and when I got back to Rockford, my friend had a van and we went around to a rock concert at Sedalia, Missouri and sold straw hats and that was the first place I had ever seen so many longhairs. It was hot - 110 degrees. They were there making love in front of God and everybody else. Just the things people do day in and day out. When we finished paying our expenses, we only had \$60 from the hats. After that, though, it was selling marijuana at concerts instead of straw hats. That's why we made \$600 instead of \$60 and it just took eight hours instead of four days like with the hats. It was lots of fun, but it wasn't exactly what I had in mind for myself.

Back in Illinois, I got all these books on how to camp and live in the wilderness. That's what I wanted, not exactly what we had - though it was fun, of course.

We went all over the place—Missouri, Indiana, North Carolina—to rock concerts and gatherings like that. Finally we went back to Miami. Then I started living a real comfortable life. Like I didn't have to work. I had small amounts of money coming in from dealing and unemployment. But it wasn't really what I wanted to do. Each day was like the other and I was just stagnating. So I got a place by myself and started doing what I wanted to do. Which one thing was to play the violin. So I got a violin teacher and started learning how to do that. And I felt real good about living by myself independent of other people—paying the rent with little part-time jobs for two or three days. And I'd buy flowers from a wholesale florist for 12 cents and sell them in wealthy areas for a quarter. Like Mother's day is a big day. Things that made me feel good rather than to make money just to make money.

The one thing that was happening to me in all this was I was learning to take care of myself and that's all. I wasn't sharing anything. I felt there had to be something else, but I didn't know what it was. I moved to the central part of Florida and started making friends in Tampa and getting involved with the things that were happening there. I started sharing—not just having \$200 in the bank all the time, but giving away my last dollar. I started seeing everybody as us rather than just me and them. I learned a whole lot about love. I realized how important it is. I had thought loving somebody meant, "He turns me on. He makes me feel good," and I realized it was a lot more than that. I realized if I said, "I love you," it meant like to serve somebody because they needed me. I began to lose a little of my selfishness. I felt I shouldn't be so frivolous with somebody's attention—that I should appreciate more what people were doing for me.

I got where I didn't have a job. I'd stay where people lived and I got to be the maid of the house or the cook to stay there. My word was that I was caretaking for these people. Someone would ask to use my car and return it with half a tank of gas. When I came back with food stamps, it was everybody's food stamps, not just mine. When I earned money selling flowers, it was everybody's money, not just mine. It was a lot different than when I was going to rock concerts making money.

I felt real strong feelings that the whole universe was one with each other—real close to people and nature. Like everyone